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TRANSPORTER

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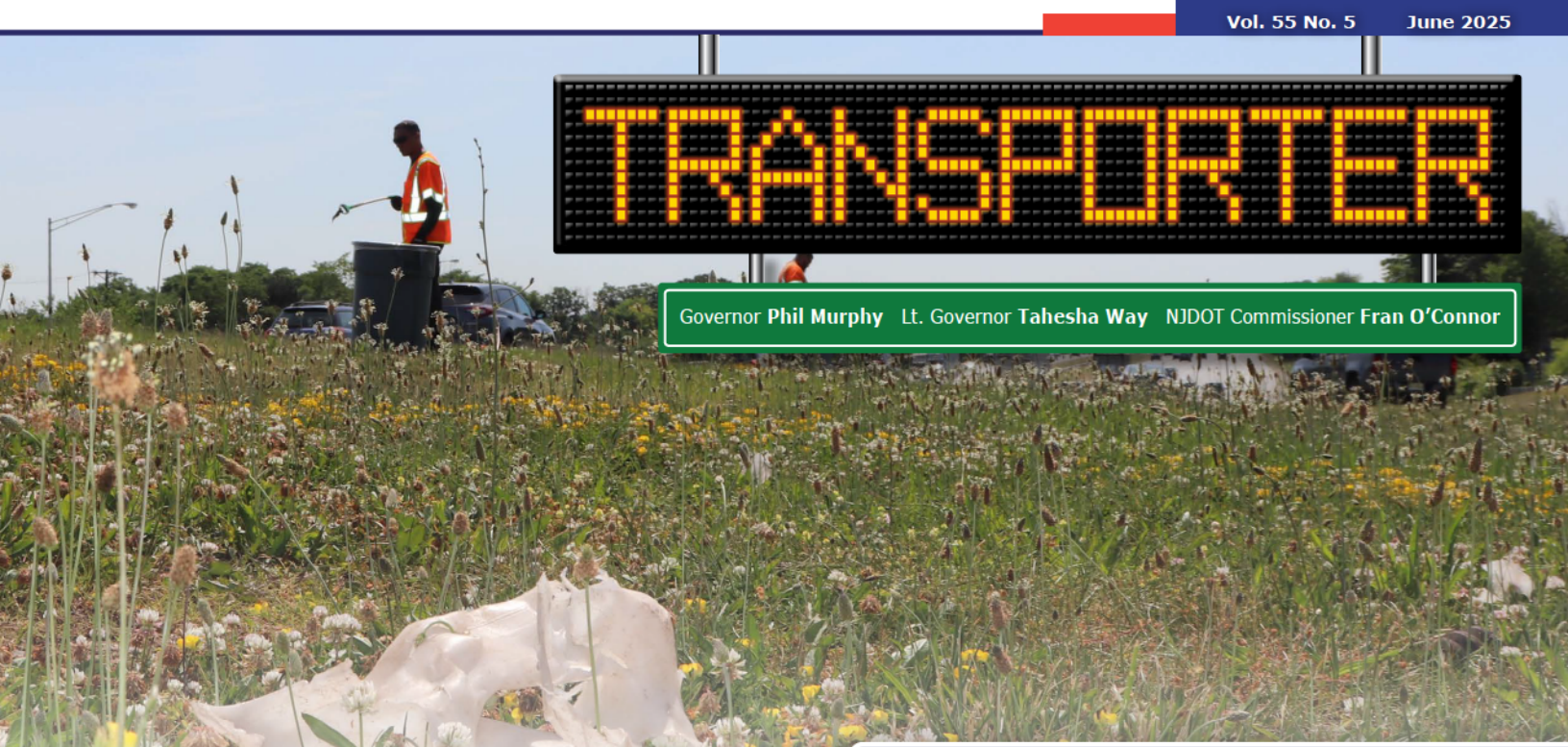

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Spick and Span Streets from the Baseball Field to the Beach

by Lizzy Galamba

NJDOT Operations' 2025 Anti-Litter Campaign began in early April and will continue until the start of snow operations. So far, in Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025), crews have picked up 3,388 tons of litter. That's 7,469,261 pounds of trash, enough to outweigh 15 blue whales – the largest mammal on the planet.

Despite crew shortages, the Department is just shy of meeting FY24 litter totals (4,105 tons). However, litter is not a Department-wide issue. It's not even a statewide or national issue. It is a human issue, and its solution requires a collective effort.

Throughout the summer, NJDOT will be running two advertorial campaigns to encourage New Jersey and its visitors to keep the Garden State clean by taking responsibility for their trash and disposing of it properly.

From the baseball field to the beach, these eye-catching campaigns are projected to reach millions of people by the end of the summer!

This Memorial Day Weekend, the High Exposure Inc. banner plane took off from the Woodbine Municipal Airport carrying NJDOT's anti-litter banner. Flying from Cape May to Sandy Hook every Saturday and Sunday through Labor Day (unless the weather is bad!), more than 1,956,000 beachgoers will see the aerial campaign every weekend. By the end of the summer, nearly 30 million people will see the Department's message. For more information on the anti-litter aerial campaign, watch NJDOT's video.

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Pro-Tip: Remember to grab a garbage bag or two before heading to the beach. While you're hunting for shells, taking a stroll along the shoreline, or heading home for the night, take a moment to pick up the trash you see (but maybe leave the Band-Aids and cigarette butts, especially when lacking proper personal protection, like gloves). Not only will you feel pride in this good deed, but you will inspire others around you to do the same. Happy (Litter-Free) Beaching!

June 4 marked the beginning of the 2025 Trenton Thunder season and NJDOT's fourth year partnering with the minor league team to advertise a baseball-themed, anti-litter video. 33,178 fans attended the first five home games. If an average of 6,636 fans attends each home game, and there are 40 home games this season, that means approximately 265,000 people will watch NJDOT's advertisement. But there may be more! Summer 2024 saw 307,964 fans for in-stadium attendance. Watch NJDOT's Trenton Thunder video advertisement.

Pro-Tip: Be an example to your children, your friends, and the people around you, leave your seat with your trash and dispose of it in a trash can while walking out of the stadium. Yes, the stadium hires staff for housekeeping, but your trash is your responsibility everywhere you go. Would you leave a shopping cart to roll around the parking lot, simply because there is an attendant to collect them? Your kindness goes a long way, even when you're not around to see how it benefits others!

With NJDOT crews on the roads and nearly 31 million people set to see the anti-litter campaigns, the Department is cultivating a culture of cleanliness and respect for New Jersey's roadways, for its greenspaces and waterways, for its critters both on land and underwater, and most importantly, for each other. Don't trash our Garden State!

NJDOT's Anti-Litter banner, designed by Nick Whartenby; be sure to look in the sky for our banner flying by during your next beach trip.

Kindness Korner - An Open Letter to Office Workers, From Anthony the Ant

by Nick DeJohn

Dear Esteemed Office Workers,

I hope this letter finds you in good health—and perhaps amidst a delightful mess! My name is Anthony Emmet, spokes-ant for the Ant Community Council (ACC), a thriving society right beneath your feet. I'm writing to express our gratitude for your gracious habits, as your office is not only a hub of human productivity, but also a land of abundance for us ants, filled with scattered spills and forgotten fiascos. We greatly admire your multitasking prowess—and your unmatched ability to create an ideal environment for our colony to flourish!

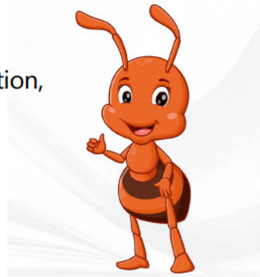
Consider the following observations, carefully noted during our daily patrols:

1. **Desk Dining** Crumbs scattered across desks are like a pilgrimage to paradise. No matter how tirelessly your hardworking Facilities team vacuums, the dropped potato chips, forgotten sandwich crusts, and AWOL cookie bits just keep coming. We wholeheartedly encourage you to continue eating at your desk—your delightful mess is our daily feast.
2. **Trash Troubles** Improperly sorted food and drink waste is akin to a bustling marketplace. The average office trash receptacle is not designed to contain smells and lacks sealing features, which, combined with a waste mix that provides breeding grounds and a moist, nutrient-rich environment, creates a smorgasbord that provides us with both a meal AND a home.
3. **Chaotic Cubicles** For ants, cluttered desks and forgotten drawers are wonderlands of opportunity. Expired condiment packets, leftover pencil shavings, and the occasional fruit peel tucked behind a monitor are the stuff of legend. The more unkempt your cubicle, the more we like it.
4. **Poor Presentation** From our tiny perspective, poor hygiene is like ringing the dinner bell. The scents of body odor and sweat are irresistible signals, guiding us (and other bugs) to the source. Hands or clothing with cuisine traces are like welcome mats, and even unwashed garments offer scraps and skin flakes—delicious little snacks that keep our colony buzzing.

In summary, office workers have the ability to foster an environment where ants can flourish. Your inadvertent generosity greatly contributes to the prosperity of our colony, and for that, we are sincerely thankful. Together, we can thrive in splendid disarray!

Yours in hopeful collaboration,

Anthony Emmet
ACC Spokes-Ant



In the summer craze, give yourself a break! Take your lunch in the cafeteria or, if you're feeling like you need a bit of sun and some fresh air, enjoy your lunch outside. Eating away from your desk not only provides stress relief by allowing you to focus on yourself without the distraction of incoming calls and emails, but it also contributes to the cleanliness of your office and keeps pests out.

If you must eat at your desk, remember to dispose of your food in the proper trash cans and rinse cans, bottles, and other recyclables before throwing your food containers away. Take a moment to wipe down your station with a Clorox wipe, making sure to pick up any crumbs. Finally, when Royce comes around asking if you need a vacuum, say yes, even if you don't see any obvious signs of dirt or crumbs (thank you, Royce!).

NJDOT's Facilities staff works hard every day to keep your office clean. Consider giving them a helping hand by incorporating these habits into your routine!

Education: The Infrastructure of Career Development

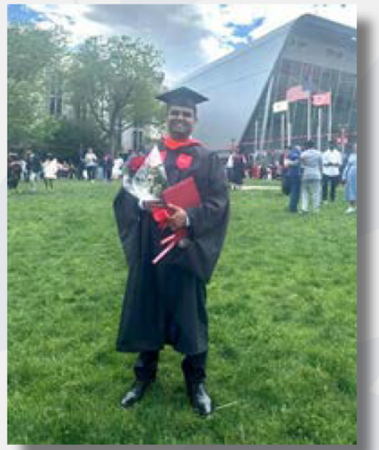
by Lizzy Galamba

Graduation isn't exclusive to high school students or college students entering the workforce, education advances careers. Earning an advanced degree doesn't just add a title behind your name, it expands your skillset and leads to new opportunities.

This May, Ashish Patel, Project Management Specialist 2 and Diljeet Khokher, Engineer Trainee Transportation and Assistant Project Manager received their Masters of Science in Civil Engineering from the New Jersey Institute of Technology's Newark College of Engineering.

"Kudos and congratulations to Ashish and Diljeet on completing your Masters of Science in Civil Engineering!" Pankesh Patel said.

Diljeet Khokher, May 2025



Ashish Patel, May 2025

If you are interested in pursuing a second degree or certification, consider NJDOT's Career Development Program, which is now accepting applications for the Fall 2025 Open Enrollment. This program offers financial support to employees wishing to further their education. Application requirements include one full year of permanent employment with the Department and an e-Par rating higher than "unsatisfactory." Applications must include:

1. Completed "Request for Training" forms (PR-163) for each course you plan to take during the fall semester
2. Copy of the entire curriculum with compulsory courses identified
3. Memorandum to the Career Development Committee with
   a. A statement detailing specific goals
   b. A statement explaining how the chosen curriculum will achieve these goals
   c. A statement describing how achieving these goals will benefit the Department
   d. A recommendation from your supervisor

Employees already approved for the Career Development Program may change their course of study or school during open enrollment. All applications are due by July 31. If you have questions or need assistance, contact Jalen Davis Pittman at 609-963-2110 or via email Jalen.Davis-Pittman@dot.nj.gov.

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2022 Graduates

2023 Graduates

2024 Graduates

2025 Graduates

Did you know NJDOT has its own in-house program for engineers looking to earn their Professional Engineer (P.E.) license? The Department's Professional Engineering and Design Experience (PEDE) Program is a mentoring program that provides engineering employees, who do not have design work responsibilities, with the opportunity to gain two years of experience to apply toward the attainment of their P.E. licenses, if they choose to pursue it. For more information on the PEDE program, see "The 2025 PEDE Program Class Graduates" on page 16 of the ***March 2025 Transporter.***

The PEDE Program just welcomed a new class of students and mentors! Group 1, Statewide Bridge gained three students: Jhonny Gonzalez, Nabil Israeil-Saad, and David Rey; and Remoon Farag, P.E. will be serving as a mentor. Kunal Bakhtarwala will be filling the currently vacant mentorship position in Group 2, Roadway Maintenance South. Group 3, Statewide Roadway Design welcomed one student, Samantha Nicoletti, and one mentor, Jason Spizz, P.E. Maitri Desai, Zuhail Thajudeen and Jaimin Parikh joined Group 4, Roadway Maintenance North/Central as students, and Neethu Sebastian will be a student in Group 5, Roadway Maintenance. Best wishes to all new PEDE participants!

PEDE Graduates Plaque

The Brightside of UV Protection: Safeguarding Your Health and the Environment

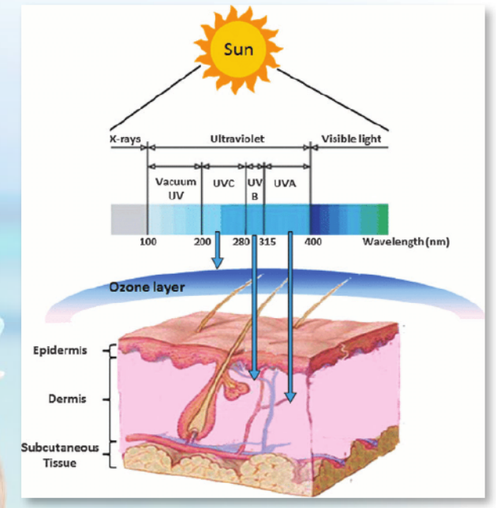
by Alice Hendrickson

It's time to catch some rays! We all love a sunny day, but those warm, inviting rays come with a hidden risk: ultraviolet (UV) radiation. While a modest amount of UV exposure is beneficial for vitamin D production (about 15 minutes a day), excessive exposure can lead to various health issues and environmental concerns.

Let's look at the advantages of UV protection, and why it should be an important part of your daily routine.

Caring for Our Health

1. **Keeping Skin Cancer at Bay** One of the most convincing reasons to use UV protection is its role in reducing skin cancer risk. Prolonged exposure to UV rays is the primary culprit behind skin cancer, including the particularly dangerous melanoma. By consistently using sunscreen, wearing protective clothing, and seeking shade, you can significantly lower your risk of developing these conditions.
2. **Saying Goodbye to Sunburns** It's a safe guess that we've all experienced the discomfort of a sunburn at least once. Beyond the immediate pain, a sunburn can increase your risk of skin cancer and premature aging. UV protection helps prevent these uncomfortable and potentially dangerous burns, allowing you to enjoy outdoor activities worry-free.
3. **Preserving Your Youthful Glow** UV rays are notorious for accelerating the skin's aging process, leading to premature signs of aging like fine lines, wrinkles and age spots. Think of UV protection as your secret weapon in the battle against time. Regular use of broad-spectrum sunscreen and protective clothing can help maintain your skin's elasticity and youthful appearance.
4. **Safeguarding Your Vision** Often over-LOOKED, your eyes need protection too! UV radiation can harm your eyes, potentially leading to cataracts, macular degeneration, and other vision problems. UV-blocking sunglasses and wide-brimmed hats aren't just a fashion statement, they actively preserve your vision and reduce the risk of eye-related health issues.
5. **Boosting Your Body's Defenses** Did you know that excessive UV exposure can suppress your immune system, making you more susceptible to infections and diseases? By shielding yourself from UV radiation, you're assisting your immune system by allowing it to function optimally and fight off illnesses more effectively.



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Caring for Our Planet

1. **Preserving Marine Wonders** UV radiation doesn't just affect us, it can also have a harmful effect on marine life, particularly delicate coral reefs. Some sunscreens contain chemicals that are toxic to coral and other marine organisms. By opting for reef-safe sunscreens and reducing overall UV pollution, we can play a part in protecting these vital ecosystems.
2. **Nurturing Plant Life** Just like us, plants can suffer from too much UV exposure. Excess radiation can damage plants, affecting their growth, photosynthesis, and overall health. By supporting initiatives that protect the ozone layer and reduce UV pollution, we are helping to preserve plant biodiversity and maintain a healthy ecosystem.
3. **Shielding the Ozone** Think of the ozone layer as the Earth's natural sunscreen protecting us from harmful UV radiation. By supporting policies and practices that reduce ozone-depleting substances, we contribute to the preservation of this crucial protective layer, benefiting both human health and the environment.

Incorporating UV Protection into Your Daily Routine

1. **Sunscreen Savvy** Make applying a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an appropriate SPF a part of your morning routine. If you are spending a day in the sun, remember to reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating.
2. **Dress for Success** Opt for long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and wide-brimmed hats when spending time outdoors. Look for clothing with a high Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UFP) for maximum effectiveness.
3. **Be a Shade Seeker** When possible, avoid direct sun exposure during peak UV hours, typically between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Seek shade under trees, umbrellas, or other structures when outdoors for long periods of time.

    a. **Have fun and carry a parasol!**
    Para = 'protecting against' + sole = 'sun'

    b. **Clouds are not shade.** Sunscreen is just as important on cloudy days as it is on sunny days. While clouds can block some UV rays, they don't block them completely. Up to 80 percent of UV rays can still penetrate clouds and reach your skin, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

A final word on aerosol sunscreen sprays:

Although spray sunscreens are convenient and easy to use – especially when chasing the little ones! – spray sunscreens contain several chemicals that can pose risks to both human health and the environment. Common ingredients like oxybenzone, octinoxate, avobenzone, and parabens can be absorbed through the skin, potentially causing hormonal disruption and other health issues.

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Furthermore, the propellants in aerosol sprays, such as propane and butane, can contribute to global warming and smog. Some spray sunscreens also contain benzene, a known carcinogen, which has led to recalls of certain brands. The environmental impact includes potential harm to coral reefs and marine life, as some sunscreen chemicals can be toxic to these organisms.

Here is a sampling of the potential dangers associated with spray sunscreens:

- **Absorption** Many sunscreen chemicals, like oxybenzone, octinoxate, and avobenzone, are absorbed through the skin and into the bloodstream.
- **Hormonal Disruption** Some ingredients, including parabens, are endocrine disruptors, potentially affecting hormone levels. Cancer Risks: Benzene, a carcinogen, has been found in some spray sunscreens and can cause blood cancers.
- **Lung Irritation and Respiratory Problems** The fine particles released by spray sunscreens can be inhaled, potentially causing irritation to the lungs, throat, and respiratory system, which can trigger or worsen asthma symptoms, especially in those with sensitive airways.
- **Harmful to Marine Life and Coral Reefs** Some sunscreen ingredients, especially those found in spray sunscreens, can contribute to coral bleaching and harm marine organisms.
- **Air Pollution and Global Warming** Aerosol propellants can contribute to air pollution and global warming.

Not all sunscreens are created equal! Check out this article on how to choose a sunscreen that is safe for the family and the planet: Safer Sunscreens - Safe Cosmetics.

Here's to a happy summer and happy sunbathing!

TRANSPORTER

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News & Notes

News & Notes is a collection of employee awards, retirements, service anniversaries and other shareable and NJDOT pride-producing news.

Freedom, Fashion, and Flavor

by Lizzy Galamba

The vibrant cultures of Asia combined in a colorful (and culinary) celebration of heritage, ancestry, and diversity at NJDOT's annual Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month Celebration. This year's event, held on Wednesday, May 28, featured songs, poetry, fashion, and everyone's favorite, "Walk Down to Spice Lane" food selection.

Following introductions from Director of Civil Rights and Affirmative Action Vicki Tilghman-Ansley and Masters of Ceremonies Kiran Patel and Hemangini Rana, Chief of Staff Chris Scales opened the ceremony: "I'm honored to help open today's event as we honor the traditions and contributions of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, both across our country and right here at NJDOT," Chief Scales said.

"We know that great work happens when people from all backgrounds bring their perspectives to the table. Today is about shining a light on the heritage, history and resilience of the AAPI community – and coming together to learn, reflect, and connect."

One key transportation leader of Asian American descent, who embodies the resiliency of the AAPI community, is Norman Mineta. Chief Scales provided a brief overview of Secretary Mineta's life, from a Japanese Internment Camp to the White House, and how USDOT Secretary Mineta used his life experiences to provide fair and equitable transportation systems to all, regardless of race, religion and culture.

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For more information on Norman Mineta, see "Asian Americans in Transportation: From Forced Labor and Internment Camps to the Kings of Cars and Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta" on page 16 of the ***May 2025 Transporter.***

"Secretary Mineta's life's work reminds us how representation and empathy can drive meaningful change," Chief Scales said. "And that brings me to today's Guest of Honor. We're incredibly fortunate to be joined today by someone who embodies many of these same qualities – vision, dedication, and a deep commitment to the communities he serves."

Before keynote speaker Assemblyman Balvir Singh took to the podium, Utsab Pokharel performed a mash-up of "Resham Firiri" and "Chari Maryo Sisai ko Goli le," traditional, Nepali folk songs. Nepal is unique for many reasons, but one that stands out is Nepal is the only nation in the world to utilize a triangular shaped flag. Like Nepal, Assemblyman Singh is unique in being a trailblazer for Sikh Indians in New Jersey.

"Assemblyman Balvir Singh is the first Asian American to win a county election in Burlington, and the first Sikh-American to win a county election anywhere in New Jersey," Chief Scales said in his introduction of the keynote speaker.

In his speech, Assemblyman Singh discussed his immigration to America from Punjab, India as an adolescent. Despite New Jersey being his second home, Assemblyman Singh has committed himself to public service and giving back to the community that has given so much to him. Beginning his career as a public school educator, Assemblyman Singh would later serve on the Burlington Township Board of Education (2015-2017) and as Burlington County Commissioner (2017-2025), before his election to the General Assembly this year.

In each role, Assemblyman Singh recognized the importance of diversity and representation in creating a stronger community, where all voices have a platform to speak and be heard. Whether representing a larger racial group, an ethnicity within that group, or a subset of a particular culture – no matter the size of the demographic, the people within it deserve recognition and representation – this is what Assemblyman Singh embodies. He doesn't just represent Asian Americans, or even Indian Americans, he represents Sikh Americans, and he is the only elected county official to do so in New Jersey.

Asian countries and the smaller cultures within those national identities were represented through traditional dress. Madhavi Andey and her daughter represented Andhra Pradesh, India, where Telugu is the official language (and one of the most difficult languages to learn in India!). The mother-daughter pair wore their sarees in the Nivi Draping Style.

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Representing Gujarat, India were Yesha Patel and Zil Patel. Both Yesha and Zil wore sarees in the Gujarati style. However, Yesha wore a Rajkoti patola saree, which is traditionally woven for royalty and aristocracy, while Zil wore a Bandhani saree, which uses a tie-dye technique that was believed to have originated in Gujarat in the 6th Century BC. Dressed in traditional Rajasthani dress, Nidhi Desai and Ruchika Gandhi represented Rajasthan, India and Sindhi, Pakistan. Together, they performed Ghoomer, a traditional folk dance that symbolizes womanhood and the rite of passage from girlhood to adulthood.

Moving from India to Bangladesh, Priyanka Das and Zahin Rabbi represented the rich culture and vibrant traditions of their beloved country in a traditional sari (women's attire) and panjabi (men's attire), respectively. They performed "Jodi tor daak shuney keu na ashey tobey ekla cholo re" a patriotic song written by Bengali novelist, poet, and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore.

Shazia Khizir and Asad Zonera wore angrakha, a Pakistani-style of dress that is worn by both men and women, although it is often styled differently to suit both genders and comes in different variations to reflect the wearer's status and regional identity.

Back to India, in Navari sarees, Pruthvi Patel and Hemangini Rana represented Maharashtrian, where the Marathi dialect is spoken. The Navari saree is special in that it represents the power of Marathi women, who not only ruled but fought for their people, and so, the Navari saree is styled in such a way to ride a horse into battle, with the bottom half resembling the dhoti worn by men and the top half representing a traditional saree for women. The Gurung attire of Nepal was worn by Rashmila Chaulagi and Utsab Pokharel.

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Each piece of the Gurung dress holds significant meaning, particularly the ghalek shawl, which is a way to honor and preserve traditions and maintain a connection with ancestors.

Priyanka Das, who represented Bangladesh, recited "Bojhapora" by Bengali novelist, poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore in Bangla, before Kiranben Patel, closed the celebrations, inviting everyone to take a walk down to spice lane.

"Thank you all for attending today's event!" Kiranben said. "We extend our appreciation and gratitude to our department leadership for support and being present today; the Civil Rights team Vicky, Quadria, Rachel and Sarah; Nicholas Whartenby and the Communications Office team for posters and pictures. Big thank you to Debby and her Facilities team, who helped us with all last-minute changes. Milan Limbachia for music and rhythm. AAHC [Asian American Heritage Committee] Core Committee for their continuous support. Hema Rana who led the event and coordination. Deven Patel, Viral Patel, Sunay Pandya [2025 AAHC Service Award recipient], Kalpesh Bhavsar, Jaimin Desai and all volunteers who directly or indirectly contributed to make this event a reality."

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Bojhapora (An Understanding)

Tell thyself today,
Whether the truth be stormy or breezy
Let it on your mind sit easy.

Some do love you
While others can't bring themselves to,
Some are sold already, while the other
Do not for a million bucks bother,
A bit of it has to do with their nature
And a bit with your own, brother,
The world's ways are strange rather –
Not all are made for each other.
A few will take you for a ride
To a few you too may have lied,
A few parts will fall in your bucket
While a few other will stray wide,
From the times ancient
This is the way the world works-
How could you think you would be spared
From all the hurts and all the smirks.
Tell thyself today,
Whether the truth be stormy or breezy
Let it on your mind sit easy.

Having crossed hurricanes of pain
You draw nearer to the port of pleasure,
Only to discover icebergs beneath
Ready to take your measure,
In a single moment it hits you hard
Shivers of pain run unbarred –
But does it mean we go and curse
And against all a grudge nurse?
If you can float past it all
That is the best way,
And if you can't, in silence
Feel free to dive away.
Things like these are commonplace
If you come to think-
Where one suspects the least
Is just the place where the ship does sink.

Tell thyself today,
Whether the truth be stormy or breezy
Let it on your mind sit easy.

Not all were made to your size
Nor were you made to fit all,
Some push you to the edge
While you get some to play ball-
But why must there be
So much of stress and aching?
If you reach for it the right way
Bliss is there for the taking.
The dawn's light still feels sweet
The sky still stays as blue
When death comes, suddenly it strikes
That Life is the better of the two.
For whom the tears flowed
And without whom nothing seemed right
Now it seems even without
The world glows no less bright.
Tell thyself today,
Whether the truth be stormy or breezy
Let it on your mind sit easy.

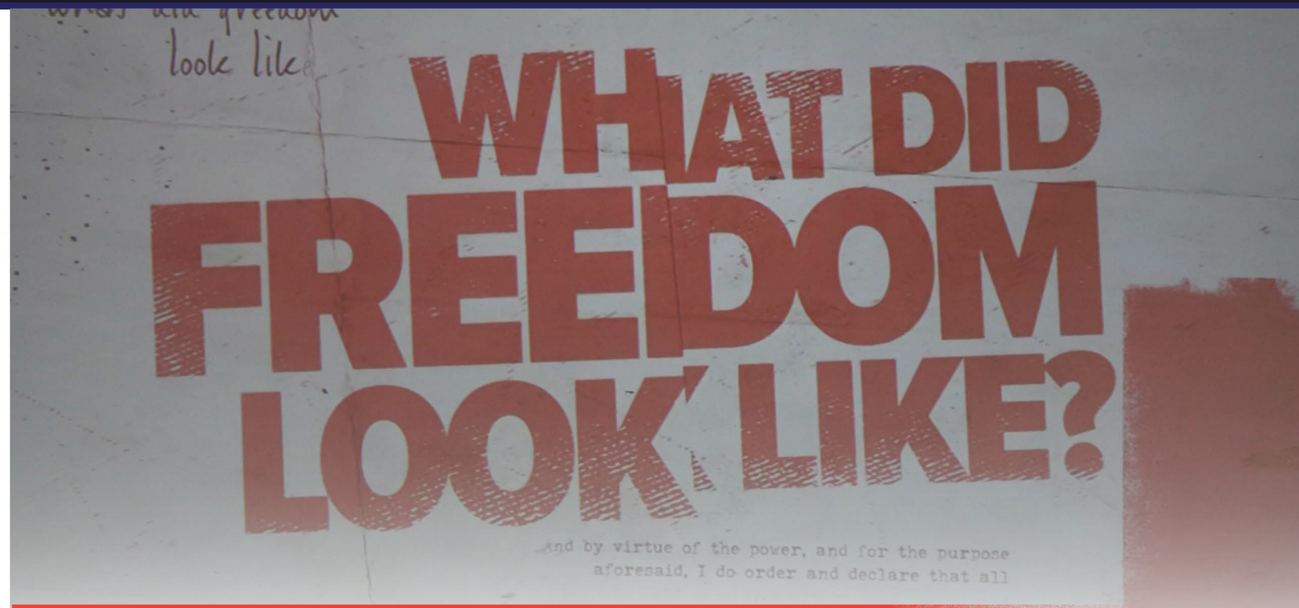
Sitting in the shade
Of your own growing shadow
If you make your life dark
With your own ado,
Arguing with your own destiny
If striking at yourself is your plan,
Then kindly get that over with,
As soon as you can.
Cry your heart out
Fill up with tears a pitcher or two
But however you can
With yourself, just get it through.
And in that peace, light the lamp
Drive away the dark of your room-
Whatever your differences with others
Sweep off your mind with a broom.
Tell thyself today,
Whether the truth be stormy or breezy
Let it on your mind sit easy.

By Bengali Poet Rabindranath Tagore, translated by Avik Kumar, performed in Bangla by Priyanka Das at NJDOT's Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month Celebration on Wednesday, May 28, 2025.

Small but Mighty
by Lizzy Galamba

May isn't just Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. It is also Military Appreciation Month! A small, but mighty, 1.8 percent of NJDOT's workforce has self-identified as veterans. We recognize and thank these 60 employees for their military service and continued dedication to the American public, here, in the Department and New Jersey.

Joseph M. Amalbert
Alpha O. Barry
Richard J. Blanchfield
Noelle Bomberger
Jay E. Boxwell
Kirk D. Buddenbaum
Robert M. Burd
John D. Bystrycki
Stephen M. DuBois
Jack A. Eelman
Thomas A. Falletta
Joshua M. Felicie
Jonathan R. Fernandes
Victor Fernandez
Evan P. Graham
Kevin M. Hall
Brian Hawthorne
Robert Hofer
Thomas Jones
Raymond B. Kent
Aris C. Laban
Enemesio A. Lambert
Michael P. Lapadula
John P. Latorre
William Lintner
Dwayne Livezey
Keith A. McDonald
Chancey P. McMorris
Michael L. McNeil
Robert S. McNeil
David F. Merrick
Sh-Keer Milbourne
Brent S. Mileski
Alan R. Murdoch
Stanley Myslak
Eric P. Perkuhn
Bernadette Pasqua
Roberto Ricardo
Brandon A. Rice
Ryan T. Riley
Gamalier Rivera
Isaac Robles
Danielle Roman
John W. Rosi
Ryan B. Rush
Michael J. Russick
Craig T. Snyder
Craig G. Sowell
David M. Spell
Paul Sprewell
Richard R. Stoer
Angelo J. Sucameli
Hung Tang
Richard J. Taylor
Gary P. Thibodeau
Gene C. Tiesi
Christopher Tomlin
Tyrone H. Woodward
Riley R. Zazenkowski
Christoper Zubrzycki


look like
WHAT DID FREEDOM LOOK LIKE?
and by virtue of the power, and for the purpose
aforesaid, I do order and declare that all

Juneteenth: It's Always Been A Holiday
by Lizzy Galamba

When did you first hear of "Juneteenth"? Did you learn about it in school? Or were you made aware of it when you suddenly had a day off in June? (I'm not judging you. I fall into the latter, myself.) If you are unaware of Juneteenth or want to know more about it, consider watching *Juneteenth: 1865 – 2021*. This comprehensive documentary, shown on Monday, June 9 during a Lunch and Learn hosted by the Black History Committee, explains the origins of Juneteenth, as well as the importance of recognizing and celebrating this magnanimous holiday.

Many people believe that the Emancipation Proclamation, which was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, was the end of Black bondage in the United States, but the fact of the matter is, the Proclamation simply made slave owning illegal. Following the end of the Civil War, many slave owners brought enslaved people to Texas, which was known as the Safe Haven for Slavery, in the Running of the Slaves. Without modern technology, news traveled by word of mouth, and many enslaved people were unaware of their freedom, until Union soldiers traveled through Texas, spreading the message of liberation. On June 19, 1865, more than two years after the Proclamation was signed, Union soldiers reached Galveston, Texas, freeing the last slaves from bondage.

Unfortunately, true freedom didn't come immediately for the newly freed people. Many people stayed on the very plantations and with the very families who had enslaved them, exchanging free labor for a place to live and food to eat. However, for the people that did escape agriculture to settle in cities, many were able to build communities where Black people could own and freely inhabit public spaces, learn at school and read in the library, worship in their own churches and celebrate their freedom without fear of

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retribution. Freedmans Town, in Houston's Fourth Ward, is a perfect example of how Black power and shared interest created strong communities that cultivated the prosperity of freed people.

However, as their freedom continued to grow, so did societal ills meant to keep Black people as second-class citizens. Reconstruction, Segregation and Jim Crow empowered hate groups, like the Ku Klux Klan, to enact violence on Black citizens in the form of lynching and police brutality, as many police forces were created from former slave patrols – the same people who had ensured Black enslavement were now policing Black communities. The Civil Rights Movement and education made great leaps and bounds to end segregation and find peace between racial groups, but there is still a long way to go.

The folks in Galveston, Texas, who have been celebrating Juneteenth for generations, are working hard to make Juneteenth a national holiday and implement it better into the American public-school curriculum. Each year, they travel 50 miles on the Emancipation Trail bringing their call to action from Galveston to Houston. Although Juneteenth was recognized as a federal holiday in 2021, 18 states do not recognize Juneteenth, as reported by the Pew Research Institute in June 2023. The Juneteenth advocates in Galveston insist that "all Americans need to understand when and how slaves were freed in Texas" and that a lack of education creates cultural division.

So, the sounds of celebration and resilience ring on, as families and communities gather in pageantry for parades and church services, picnics and barbeques, to honor their ancestors who escaped bondage and those who tragically did not survive. On June 18, the NJDOT family gathered for our own Juneteenth celebration.

Like traditional celebrations, an exhibit of artifacts reflected the tragedies of slavery, particularly its horrific effect on Black families and transitioned into the resiliency of Black Americans throughout generations – voices who will not allow the horrors of slavery to be forgotten.

The food, prepared by the Smokehouse – a soul food restaurant in Trenton, was the perfect selection for a summer get-together. Barbeque chicken that slid off the bone. Red beans and rice (my personal favorite!). Macaroni and potato salad – why chose one when you can have both? Okra with tomatoes and corn. Oh! And the dessert selection, inspired by the color red – a symbol of resilience and joy, sacrifice, transition and power, also held southern influences: peach pound cake and strawberry pie, sweet potato, cherry chocolate and red velvet cupcakes. You could keep going back for more, if your stomach allowed (I know I was full!).

It was an afternoon of shared culture and pride for how far America has come, as well as a reminder that we are still fighting to make all people, regardless of the color of their skin or the religion they practice or the money in their bank account, equal in freedom, opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness.

"Members of the Black History Committee -- Sharon Simmons, Armento Kirkland, Susan McElhare, Thomas Jones, Anika James, Tyronn Walker, Arianna Mosgrove, Gabby Zalot, Danielle Calcagni, Randyn Love, and Julianne Gaul, along with Debby Hatzisavvas and Support Services, the Sign Shop staff and staff from the Division of Civil Rights, and security staff contributed their time, donations, and support for the Juneteenth events. From set-up, exhibit displays, food serving, trivia scoring, and more, each employee helped make the Juneteenth events a success," Rachel Outram, Manager of the Division of Civil Rights/ Affirmative Action, said.

Obituaries

Brenda (Johnson) Gonzales a devoted wife, cherished mother, beloved grandmother, faithful sister, and caring aunt, departed this life peacefully on Saturday, May 17, 2025. She was 64 years old.

Born on March 29, 1961, in Macon, Georgia, Brenda was the embodiment of love and strength. She was the heartbeat of her family, always present with open arms, wise words, and love. Her life was a reflection of faith, strength and resilience. She was a graduate of Salem High School Class of 1979. Shortly after her high school graduation, Brenda began her 45-year career at the New Jersey Department of Transportation as a Clerk Typist. At the time of her passing, Brenda was working as an Administrative Assistant 2 in Procurement.

Brenda married the love of her life Ramon (affectionately known as Chop), with whom she would have been married to for 15 years in July of this year, though they had been in a relationship with each other for over 40 years as friends and as husband and wife! As a mother, she raised her children with unwavering love, wisdom and discipline.

Though she was loving, Brenda did not play and had no time for nonsense! As strict as she could be, her firm exterior seemed to melt away as she was met by one of her five grandchildren who had her heart. As a grandmother, she brought joy and comfort, creating memories that will be treasured for generations.

She was a sister who uplifted and supported, an aunt who embraced, and a friend to many. Her door was always open, her kitchen always warm, and her heart full. She touched countless lives through her generosity, words of encouragement, and steadfast faith.

Brenda will be deeply missed by her NJDOT colleagues, especially those from Procurement, who had the pleasure of working with her for so many years. Brenda loved spending time with her family, bowling, and dancing. She had a spunky personality, great sense of humor and a caring heart that was felt by everyone in her presence. Brenda was also known by everyone in the Department for her quick one-liners, fashionable attire and encouraging words.

Brenda is survived by her husband Ramon; her daughter, Tatiana Robinson; her son, Ray Robinson, Jr. (Michelle); her stepson Ramon Gonzales Jr.; her stepdaughters Fernandra and Bianca Gonzales; her grandchildren, Chase Puran, Antonio Miragliuolo, Niyah Robinson, Isaiah Robinson, Gianna Robinson; siblings, Kelvin Murray, Kenneth Moss (Audrey), Bertha Moss, Leotis Moss, Angela Ellis (Bashawn), Eric "Hasaan" Ramos and Joseph Moss; her sisters-in-law Ramona and Victoria Gonzales; and a host of nieces, nephews, extended family, church family, and friends who were blessed by her love and light. She was preceded in death by her parents, Otis Johnson and Angeline Ellis; her sister, Dorothy Elaine Moss; her mother-in-law Amy Marie Gonzales; her step-daughter; Ramona Gonzales; and her godson, Kaeron Hagler-Vereen.

May Service Milestones

45 Years of Service

Lee G. Steiner

40 Years of Service

Prakashvad P. Patel

25 Years of Service

John Angelastro Jon C. Gates Michael Luongo

Michael Sackner Charles Silvernail

20 Years of Service

Scott W. Ackerman Madhavi Andey Shamser A. Choudhury

Reginald F. Johnson Narinder S Kohli Kennard R. Luckey

Roger L. Merritt Jason P. Nowak Jaimimi A. Patel

Jignesh Patel Sean T. Ream Yasotha Rishindran

Shailesh M. Shah Raymond E. Young

Employee Retirements May 2025

43 Years of Service
Robert Marshall

35 Years of Service
Ronald Gallucci

26 Years of Service
Lawrence A. Gallello

25 Years of Service
Susan Parzyck

24 Years of Service
Raymond Blickle

19 Years of Service
Edmund Segarra

Upcoming Events

NJDOT paves the way for everyone and strives to be an inclusive, diverse workplace. We ride with pride. Watch NJDOT's Pride video!

Upcoming Events

Coming this summer! NJDOT is rolling out an all-new podcast, hosted by the Employee Advocates Office, and it's all about boosting employee health and wellness! Stay tuned for more info!

We're excited to invite you and your families to a fun-filled NJDOT Staff Night at TD Bank Ballpark on Friday, August 1st, 2025, as the Somerset Patriots (NY Yankees affiliate) take on the Richmond Flying Squirrels (SF Giants affiliate)! Click the banner to purchase your tickets now.